Gospel Religion.

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"And I, brethren, when I come to you, come not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I am determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. But my speech and my preaching is not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and power, that our faith may not stand in the wisdom of men; but in the power of God. We can speak wisdom among them that are wise,—yet not the wisdom of this world, that cometh to naught,—but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world, unto our glory."

The mystery hidden in the language of the Spirit by Paul, Rom. 1:16, when the "power of God unto Salvation" is declared to be the "gospel of Christ," and by it, and it alone, are men saved, 1 Cor. 15: 1, 2, "for it is not of man," but of God, Gal. 1:11.

There need not be any mystery about this plain declaration of divine truth, but it seems so mysterious that men cannot understand it. They do not comprehend how the "gospel of Christ" can save without being doctored in some way. Some dare to so live and do, as if it was not an all-sufficient rule of life to bring salvation; for some do not obey it all; others add to it, as though the Lord Jesus did not know what all was necessary unto salvation. And when we make the assertion that "the gospel of Christ" is an all-sufficient rule of life to bring salvation, we are confronted with the interrogation, "how can you govern the church without some ecclesiastical rule?" This at once shows the want of faith in the perfection of God's law, and nothing could be more absurd than to presume to make additions to the law that was ordained in heaven and given to the world by the Son of God, and declared "finished" by himself.

Nothing that man has invented yet has added one tittle to the perfection of the plan of salvation. Nothing can take the place of the "gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation," —the only rule that was ever revealed to men, by which they may become Christ-like, and it was revealed for the one specific purpose of saving man, and in order to be saved by it, we must be brought into relation with it; and how can we be brought into relation with it without obeying it? Can we be brought into relation with it by obeying something else? If so, what? Who knows? Christ says, "teaching them to obey all things whatsoever I have commanded you, etc." "All things,"—nothing less, and if this gospel is the power of God unto salvation, what more would be needed? What more could be used? These "all things that I have commanded," are "the power of God unto salvation,"—nothing more; nothing less.

As there is but one Author of salvation, there is but one plan. If there are more plans, there are more authors, and who are these authors, and what are the plans? Men differ so much that they would naturally differ in their way of saving men,—and then the idea of man saving man, or producing a system whereby he can be saved. Everybody, in one voice, would say it was absurd But then if the Catholic ritual or Luther's catechisms or Calvin's creeds or German Baptist A. M. decisions are worth anything at all, for any purpose whatever, they further the plan of salvation. If they do that, they are equal to the gospel. The gospel, of itself then, is not a perfect plan of salvation, and Christ is not a perfect Saviour. But man is to some extent the author of the plan of salvation, and to the same extent his own Saviour. No one will accept or believe these statements, and yet these churches will hold their members to obey their disciplines and decisions.

Now if their disciplines and decisions are no part of the plan of salvation, why should they be obeyed at all. But if they are, which shall we obey? All of them, or anyone we choose,—which? Of course a Catholic would say, "Our ritual must be obeyed. The German Baptist would say, "our A. M. decisions must be obeyed. Now which horn of the dilema will you choose? If your creeds are good and essential, then Christ is not the Saviour, nor is the gospel the perfect plan of salvation. If they are not good and essential, then it is wicked to enforce them, and nothing is plainer than this fact. The church of Christ does not tolerate wickedness.

The plan of salvation cost the blood of the Son of God. Salvation can only be obtained by obedience to the will that was revealed in that sacrifice. Hence, Gospel Religion connot be acquired in any other way, or by any other means than by obeying the gospel of Christ, and Christ being the author of salvation, he most assuredly has the prerogative to make the conditions, men's creeds to the contrary notwithstanding. This is wisdom that many have yet to learn, or be eternally lost.

Now I come to consider the *Government of a Gospel Church.*

Many of us have been taught that the gospel alone is not a sufficient rule to govern the church by. This idea not only detracts from the perfection of the gospel, but it shows at the same time a want of faith in the wisdom and power of its author. This is an eloquent argument against the faith of such a church.

"First pure, then peacable," is the way James expresses it (3:17). Peace depends on purity. Until the filth of man's wisdom is purged from the law of church government, there can be no purity, nor can there be peace. Christ, nor the gospel, are at fault. The fault is in the introduction of something outside the gospel,—something that man has made,—something that Christ never intended should involve the peace of the church, or the standing of one single member, or he surely would have included it in the will and sealed it with his blood. Destroying members and the peace of the church by something outside the gospel, is anti-Christ. If Christ, the author of salvation, did not make certain things obligatory and a test of membership, how can,—how dare any church assume to do it? They bring on themselves the condemnation of Mat. 7: 1, 2, and Rom. 2: 1, 2, 3.

The only safe and wise and Christian way is to discard all decisions and notions of men, take the gospel of Christ, teach it with power and such manifest love, that all Christians will obey it—will obey from the heart that form of doctrine once delivered unto the saints. This is the only way to promulgate gospel religion. Notice here, "That form of doctrine delivered you."—"Delivered,—in the past tense—was by Paul to the Roman brethren 1800 years ago. If our teaching has been right Paul did not have a perfect "form of doctrine" to deliver to the Roman . But if it was a perfect doctrine, why is it not perfect yet? Why do we need additions to the doctrine? Surely we do not.

Now I come to another point, and a very important point it is, too. We have always been taught that the church of Christ must have a denominational or general government—that such a government only could maintain peace in the church. Are such teachings according to the Word? Is such teaching gospel? Has such practice produced and maintained peace? It surely has not done it, and the reason is obvious. It is not gospel, as we shall proceed to notice. I would however remark, had the gospel alone been used in a general government, the result doubtless would have been different. But under present ruling it has been a failure. Of course as to faith and doctrine, there will be one principle governing every Christian, but as to incidental individual affairs, there is a better way.

Now to "the law and testimony." I open my Bible at Revelations, and there I find the Spirits address to the seven churches of Asia. And there I find a church—yea, five churches, whom "one that was like unto the Son of man" had occasion to reprove. Now, according to the doctrine of some, there could not have been one good church—no, not one good member in all the seven churches in Asia Minor. But on the contrary we find that two churches have nothing laid to their charge, but are commended for their faithfulness and have the promise of "a crown of life."

But to the testimony. In the remaining five churches, there are those "who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." But he saith to the faithful in that same church, (Pergamos) "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in that stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it." (2:17). Does this look like one, or a few even, bad members would defile good and faithful members that they could not be saved?

Now let us consider the address of the Spirit to the Church at Thyatira. After acknowledging their "faith and patience and works" it says, I have some things against the"—the elder doubtless— "because thou sufferest the woman Jezebel to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things offered to idols," etc. "And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the sins and hearts, and I will give unto every one of you according to his works." Now take particular notice. "But unto you I say and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine and which have not known the depth of Satan as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already. Hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron," etc. Oh, what a glorious promise to the faithful, even in a church where there are those that hold doctrine contrary to heaven's will.

"And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: I have not found thy works perfect before God." But "thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels."

Here is the Spirit's doctrine—heaven's will—God's way. Will we have God's way which is revealed in the "gospel of Christ," or will we have commandments made by men and conflicting with the Spirit's teaching in divine revelation? May the Lord help us to accept that which will stand and that which will save, which is Christ's gospel. The scripture above quoted puts at rest forever the idea that we are our brother's keepers. We are not responsible for their deeds in any sense whatever, only so far as our influence goes, until there is a plain violation of God's law, then Matt: 18: 17 steps in.

In closing this already lengthy article, I must add a few thoughts as testimony in a more direct way, as to the government of a gospel church.

I observe now that salvation is an individual matter. No one can save another. Many cannot save the few. Each one must work out their own salvation. And I observe further that there must be holiness in the individual before there can be holiness in the church, and just as the individual is, so is the church. It is an absurdity to think that that the church could be better than the individuals that compose it. Then it is a fact that the condition of the church depends on the individual, and not the individual on the church. I know this idea does not obtain among some, yet the "Spirit's address to the churches" proves this to be a fact.

The church being made up of individual members, it can only be what the individuals make it. If the individuals are holy the church will be holy, and *vice versa.*

We have been taught that the counsel of the church is far superior to the mind of the individual. Why should it be? Who can give a good reason? What is a church decision but the expressed mind of the individual members? Now if each one has expressed themselves right, that is, have given a correct judgment, the decision is right. But if ninety-nine have given a wrong judgment and one a right judgment, will the wrong obtain because of the ninety-nine against the one? God forbid. One individual is liable to err. So is another, and another, and just so is the church. Now how can the judgment of the church be so infallible as it is held by some?

I have seen members suffer from church decisions, that were obtained by falsity and misrepresentations, and known to be wrong, yet because of the majority it had to stand. But God will judge all such wickedness, notwithstanding it was done in the name of the church.

It is plain, looked at from a gospel standpoint, that this forced submission to church decisions is wrong. It savors of Catholicism, borders on infallibility and cannot have God's sanction, because it is not according to his will. The only way known to the Bible to govern a church is to take the "gospel of Christ" as the man of our counsel, accord to each member their respective rights, each esteeming others better than themselves, having that all-sufficient charity "that is not easily provoked," and above all having "the mind of Christ" and "humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God," not treating a member's membership as a light thing, but being willing to lay down our lives for our brethren, we will bear and forbear, confessing our faults one to another, which is good for the soul. This is what I conceive to be the gospel way to govern a church. I do not only conceive it, but I do find it in the Bible, hence it is the only way to do if we would do as Christ taught. And "if we have not the mind of Christ, we are none of his."